

My Brother JJ and His Battle with Polio

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~~~~~ **Prologue** ~~~~~

Let me first explain that I am not a writer, however, this is one story that is so important to me that I feel compelled to tell it before I run out of time. I had an older brother many years ago, in my mind the best big brother a boy could ever have. He was about four and a half years older than I was, and he was a half brother from my mother's first marriage. That didn't matter to me. At my age, I didn't even know what the phrase "half brother" meant. He was my big brother who looked after me, and he was my best friend, always there when I needed him. However, when I was about 8 years old, he seemingly just walked out of our lives one evening. I didn't know when we walked out our back door one evening to take JJ to the doctor with his head sagging that I would never see him again. The doctor said he should be admitted to the hospital that very evening, and I didn't know that a scourge named Polio would slowly take his life away as he struggled to breathe in an Iron Lung until his heart didn't have the ability to beat anymore.

Life must go on; we all know that. One has to put tragedies behind and move on; we all know that. But when I reflect on JJ, the best big brother in the world, someone who enjoyed life immensely, someone who smiled with excitement almost non-stop, someone with such promise and who had so much to look forward to, it just isn't right that he could just leave and be forgotten without his story being told. He didn't even get so much as an "In Memoriam" mention in the school year book. Maybe that was because people were afraid of even the mention of that dreaded word polio. He did make the record books as the first recorded polio fatality of Mercer County in Pennsylvania but that's about it. He seemingly just disappeared and was forgotten thereafter except for the heartache in those close to him, but the best big brother in the world deserves so much more than that. His story must be told, and I realize as I write this, that I am the only one remaining who was close enough to him to tell his story. So, this is the story of Julius Joseph Garity (JJ), 1938-1951. It's not the complete story of JJ because what I have written is solely from my life experiences with JJ, but there is more to his story than you might imagine.

~~~~~ **Fun with JJ in the Country** ~~~~~

There can be no better place for a boy to grow up than in the countryside, especially when he has a big brother to look after him. And, there could be no better big brother than JJ. He loved life and he loved to share his love of life and excitement with me. For example, I remember well the day my father arrived home with three Schwinn bicycles in the back of a pickup truck, a big blue 26 inch bike for JJ, a smaller 24 inch for me, and a girl's bike for my sister. If I remember correctly, the bikes were for Christmas, but you can't hide three bikes very well and JJ was overflowing with excitement at the prospect of having a bicycle while I wondered

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why anyone would want a bike. Wouldn't toys be better?

Well, come next summer, JJ showed me what bikes were for. Bikes were like cars for kids! Bikes were freedom! Bikes were for exploring, meeting up with other boys, adventure, and JJ was always there to look after me. My bike had a flat tire one day, a long way from home, and you can't pedal a bike that has a flat tire, or at least I couldn't, but JJ had a solution. For some odd reason, he had a length of rope with him and he decided to give me a tow home. It was awkward, but with the added strength of JJ's legs, I was able to get home without walking.

Of course, bikes weren't the only source of fun in the country. It's something special for a young boy to watch a field of grass being cut, then raked and later baled for hay. Old man Yasnowski had large fields and would pay the older boys like JJ twenty five cents to help stack bales on the hay wagon as the old Farmall, with its steel-spiked rims, slowly pulled the wagon through the field. I wasn't big enough to help, but I got to enjoy the experience of riding high on that old hay wagon while JJ helped and kept me out of harms way.

JJ was always looking for ways to share fun with me. Most times it would work out well but sometimes it didn't quite work out in spite of his good intentions. He once built a tree house for us back in the woods, a simple affair, just slabs of wood nailed across a couple of strong branches. It sure looked like fun, every boys dream. JJ had no trouble convincing me to make the climb. Climbing is no problem because you're looking up where everything looks close at hand, it's no problem. But, oh boy, when you get up there and look down! Who knew I had a fear of heights? JJ sure didn't know. Not even I knew. No amount of cajoling and begging was getting me to climb down. JJ went and got my father and even he couldn't get me down. He had to make a second trip with an extension ladder so he could come up and physically drag me off. I feel bad now when I think about that effort of love by JJ. All he wanted was to have fun with his little brother in a tree house. I wish it had worked out that way.

That newly learned fear of heights came back to ruin another of JJ's attempts to share fun with me. A few miles down the road, a short ride by bike, there was a house that sat above a high hillside overlooking the Shenango River. There was an enormous tree near the river, and the owner had rigged an enormous rope swing from a high branch. A long wooden ramp had been built so one could walk to the top of the ramp, jump on the swing, and swing clear out over the waters of the Shenango. Great fun! Right? Well, JJ thought so, and he thought I should share in the fun he and the older boys were having. So, they loaded me onto the swing, pulled me to the top of the ramp and let go. Instead of having fun, that ride out over the river was the moment I learned what gut-wrenching, paralyzing fear was. Looking down at the brown, swirling waters, I wrapped both arms around the swing ropes and held them tight to

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my body. When the swing was back over the ramp, you were supposed to jump off, but there was no way I was going to release those ropes in spite of all the yelling to jump; I was too paralyzed to jump and headed back out over the river for a second trip. I figured I would spend the rest of my life dangling over the river but, on the second return trip over the ramp, I felt JJ's strong grip on my foot. Maybe he made an ill-advised decision that day, but he was there to rescue me in the end.

Of course, boys being boys, there will always be bad decisions. A new house was being built next door and there aren't many things that would pique a boys interest more than a construction site just waiting to be explored. So, there we were, day after day watching the work in progress. Then one day, one of the two workers there said they had to go into town for supplies and asked if we would like to ride along. "Sure!" was the answer to that. Who wouldn't enjoy riding in the back of an old Chevy work van, sitting on lumber and tools, being one of the guys. Just great! Well, you may be thinking something very bad happened, but no, it was great fun, exciting, and ended well---at least until we told our parents how we spent the day. Wow! I guess you're not supposed to go off and do stuff like that without permission. Who knew?

Fortunately, JJ was able to share his love of life in other ways that did work out well. Camping out in a tent far back on a friend's property was fun for the older boys. I'm sure they didn't want a little kid spoiling their fun, but there I was because JJ wanted me there. I did give them a laugh or two though, like when I suggested one of them sleep near the front of the tent to protect us against bears. I still remember the howling laughter. In the morning, it was great fun watching them build a fire to cook scrambled eggs and brew coffee, or something resembling coffee. To this day, my favorite breakfast is burnt scrambled eggs and black, tar-like coffee. My thoughts always turn to JJ, and I long to be back by that campfire again.

All boys like planes, trains and automobiles. I already described the fun ride in the old Chevy work van. Then too, we had a 1942 Dodge whose speedometer would change color as the car accelerated. It glowed green at first, and then would change to yellow as the speed increased, and finally, if the Dodge was driven fast enough, the speedometer would turn red. Of course, as we stood on the back floor, leaning over the front seats, the cries were always "Make it turn red Dad!" He didn't often oblige, but it was fun when he did.

There were times I couldn't accompany JJ because of my age, but he always shared his fun as best he could in words. He once got to travel with our maternal grandparents on a trip out west, to Yosemite National Park to the best of my knowledge. My grandfather had built a wedge-shaped travel trailer that he was quite proud of, and I envied JJ for being able to travel and sleep in that trailer, but he shared the adventure with me when he got back. I think he was most excited about watching

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the speedometer of that 1936 Buick climb to 85 mph as it sped across the desert with the homebuilt trailer in tow. And yes, I believe that old Buick did attain that speed because our grandfather was a big Swedish man who liked to drive fast like most Swedes do. And, more importantly, JJ never lied to me; his word was golden. Now, instead of envy, I feel gratitude that JJ was able to have had such a fun adventure in his short life.

Although cars and bikes were fun, it's mostly the excitement of planes and trains that I remember. For a rural area, there seemed to be an unusual amount of aircraft back in the late 40's and early 50's, and a lot of it seemed to be military although I'm not sure. As a kid, a plane was a plane to me. We lived in the Shenango Valley area of western Pennsylvania which was close to Youngstown, Ohio. An Air Force base was opened at Youngstown airport in 1952 and these memories predate 1952 but maybe there was activity prior to that. I remember many of the planes having a single engine with wings beneath the fuselage, and flying very low, scary low. That's when JJ would spring into action, yelling excitedly "Ted! Ted! Come here and wave at the plane and he'll wave back!" I was sure he was crazy. Why would a pilot wave to kids; he probably couldn't even see us. But wave we did, and guess what. As the plane passed low overhead, emitting a scary roar, the wings would dip side to side, giving two happy kids a big wave. Wow!

But those high-flying jets! There would be no wave from them, and so silent, at least at first sight. That's when JJ would spring into action again, yelling "Ted! Ted! Look at the jet! You can't hear it can you?" And, sure enough I couldn't; I could barely see it. Then he would yell "Wait! You'll hear it with a big boom! Wait!" And, sure enough, there would be a big boom followed by a steady roar. Then he would yell "Look! The sound can't keep up with the jet! The jet's over there, but the sound is back there!" Well, that was a big mystery to a kid who had not yet learned about the rather slow speed of sound compared to the speed of light, sonic booms and such, but it was great and exciting.

JJ never missed a chance to share an exciting moment with me. This was back in the days when steam locomotives, those steam-belching behemoths, labored hard pulling their long heavy loads. Those big engines were fun to watch, but I didn't realize how exciting they could be until JJ shared a moment with me. We were on a vacation trip somewhere up towards Canada and the Great Lakes. I don't know exactly where we were, but it doesn't matter. We had stopped at a budget-priced tourist home for the night. There were railroad tracks behind the home, literally curving out of a forest and then disappearing back into the forest. There was no air conditioning, and it was hot, making me very cranky and tired. JJ had sat himself in the open rear window, and he suddenly started yelling "Ted! Get over here! There's a train coming!" I refused, but my parents said "Go on Ted, watch the train." Really,

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they just wanted grumpy me out of their way, so I stomped on over as JJ yelled "Hurry up!" and I obligingly put my head out the window and, with a scowl on my face, looked at the gently curving tracks disappearing into the forest. I was wondering why there was so much fuss about empty tracks when a high-speed train blasted out of the forest seemingly directly at the window. The floor shook, steam belched, and a mighty rumbling clickety-clack roar continued for quite sometime as I stood there with wide-eyed amazement. It was I who was thereafter sitting in the open window anxiously waiting for another train until our parents dragged me away and sent me to bed. I've been hooked on trains ever since. Thank you for that JJ.

It was always about sharing; that was what JJ was about. I still have one memento of his attitude of caring and sharing. The memento is a simple school shop-class project, a lamp, made of wood in the shape of an old water pump with a spout reaching toward a water tub. It was made so that you could attach a chain to the end of the handle for operating an on-off switch when you pumped the handle. The excellent craftsmanship is an example of how JJ put his body and soul into everything he did. For comparison, I made a candle holder, two pieces of wood with a metal hood. Now you might wonder how a shop-class project, no matter how well made, could be a memento of caring and sharing. In answer, I still have visions of the excitement in JJ's eyes the day he brought that lamp home and proudly described it to me. He explained in intricate detail how each part was made, the cutting, the sanding, and even how he used a square drill to make the rectangular cavity in the water tub. I couldn't figure out the square drill part; it made no sense to me no matter how much time JJ spent trying to explain it to me. But I recently looked it up because I just had to know if there was such a thing. Turns out there is. Thanks again JJ.

With all of this talk of sharing, I longingly remember how we shared a bed. Our house was a small bungalow that my father built himself. With the help of his father, he even dug the basement with only a pick, shovel and wheelbarrow. Consequently, the house was small and JJ and I shared a bedroom which only had room for one bed which we shared. Can you imagine how great that was? I had the best big brother in the whole world to look after me and share with me. It was wonderfully comforting to put my back up against JJ's big strong back. It made me feel safe, happy, comfortable and secure as I dozed off into a night of sweet dreams, expecting life like this to go on forever.

~~~~~**An Ending**~~~~~

I guess everything in life has an ending, just like sweet dreams come to an abrupt end when we awake back into reality. I had no idea then that an idyllic time with the best big brother in the world had reached an end as we walked out the door one dark evening. When I asked where we were going, I was told that we were taking JJ to a

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doctor because he didn't feel well and he was having trouble holding his head up. I could see his head was leaning down, and I felt sorry for him. His always cheerful countenance had been replaced by a worried frown. But, not to worry, we were taking him to the doctor and doctors fix people when they are sick. Everybody knows that.

After the doctor had examined JJ, I remember sitting in a room with my parents and the doctor. JJ seemed to be missing. The doctor was explaining to my parents that it would be best if he admitted JJ to the hospital that evening, and he would take care of everything. I had been in a hospital once; I think it was pneumonia. You stay there for awhile while doctors and nurses look after you, and your father brings you nice books to read. My book had fuzzy animals that I could touch. There were many other beds in the large room too, with kids who would talk to you. It was fun in a way. But, you get better and then you go back home and everything is just like it used to be. Everybody knows that. So it would be a while, but soon JJ would be home again, and I would have the reassuring comfort of his strong back against mine at night.

I slowly started to realize that JJ was much more sick than I thought because time was passing and my mother seemed worried. She gathered my older sister, younger brother and myself together, and we sat there on a bed as she prayed for JJ to get better. She explained that he needed God's help. Well, I knew then that JJ was really very sick if he needed God's help, and I knew that it would be a long while before he got home. I was missing him very much but I could wait because, if God was helping, he would come home for sure. Everybody knows that.

I had never heard anyone crying like that. My sister and younger brother and I were at my aunt's house in the city. They were looking after us while my parents were at the hospital. The crying was coming from outside, on the sidewalk. I looked out the window and saw that it was my mother crying like that. My father was trying to help her. She was having trouble walking. I can't put into words what that crying was like. But I think you can imagine. Imagine sitting with your first child, a once joyful child, now confined motionless in an iron lung with only his head exposed while the iron lung helps him breathe because the polio virus has robbed him of that essential ability. Next, imagine that the polio virus so weakens him that his heart can no longer beat, and the once vibrant child that you so loved is gone from your life. I think you can imagine the crying. I couldn't stand to see my mother crying like that; I wanted to make her feel better. But, how does an 8 year old boy do that? I certainly didn't know. But I did know that something terrible had happened to JJ.

Only time can ease the kind of suffering my mother was feeling. I regret it now, but I only made her suffering worse over the following days. I would look at that big empty bed we used to share. I could almost see JJ, sitting on the bed frame, laughing with joy about something, and sharing his joy. So, I would ask my mother why he

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couldn't be there anymore, and she would warmly explain to me that he was sleeping. "Sleeping! Well, why can't someone wake him up?" I exclaimed. So, tearfully, she would explain that he couldn't be awakened from the type of sleep he was in.

So, gradually, I came to understand that I wouldn't see JJ anymore. He was just a few weeks shy of his thirteenth birthday, but he never got to experience being a teenager. My life would have to go on without the world's best big brother to look after me. My last memory of being with him was on a cold, dreary, wet day at the cemetery while they put JJ's body in the ground. I stood there shivering, looking at the small mausoleum building nearby, and wondering why it had to be this way. I couldn't understand why, but I knew my days of sharing with JJ had come to an end. Or so I thought.

~~~~~ **A Gift, a Promise Kept** ~~~~~

My father and JJ would occasionally try to teach me some baseball skills by playing catch with me or by softly pitching the baseball to me while I waved a bat helplessly at the passing ball. Once in while, more by chance than by skill, I would make contact with the ball and hit a little blooper whereupon JJ would yell enthusiastically "Wow! He's going to be a great baseball player!" And, of course, I believed him---after all, he was my big brother and, to me, his words were golden, his words were a promise. After JJ's death, I learned a little more about the sport from friends and the new medium of television. From then on, I yearned to be a baseball player just like JJ promised I would be. It was for that reason that I coaxed my father into taking me to Little League tryouts in the spring, a few months after my 10th birthday if I remember correctly. When he asked me what position I wanted to play, I thoughtfully replied, "Catcher." I had no idea what a catcher was, but I knew I wanted to catch the ball and assumed catcher was the obvious position for me.

It was at that first tryout that I learned the hard way that some kids are born athletes, while others, like myself, are born clumsy and uncoordinated. About all I remember from that tryout is watching other kids catching baseballs and me being told to "stay out of the way or get your face punched in." "Next summer," I thought. "I'll practice this summer and make the team next summer" I reasoned. That summer was the first of several long hard summers trying to master baseball. I carry many painful memories from those days of learning.

I remember talking my way into a pickup game with some older boys and then waiting for the ball to come my way so I could show my stuff. At last, it came my way. It was a hard ground ball, right at me. Right at my Adam's apple it came. I remember some of the boys laughing while others said "Leave him alone; can't you see he's hurt?" But most of all, I remember the two women sitting on a bench along the sidelines, rolling in laughter. If you've ever been to the funhouse at an amusement



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park, where the fat lady stands above the doorway, rocking and shrieking with laughter, you know the laugh. But laughter and tears don't stop a determined ten year old. Neither does the pain from the well-intended advice of a coach telling you to "change the way you throw because you throw like a girl." Neither does the agonizing, breathless eternity arising from a hard line drive to the stomach. "Next summer" was waiting.

I almost made the team next summer. Not because I had improved, but because there was just one too few uniforms and there was another boy almost equally clumsy. On the last day of tryouts, the manager said he would hit each of us ten fly balls and whoever caught the most was on the team. After nine attempts, the other boy had caught most of his and I, as usual, had caught none. There was no need for the manager to hit the tenth ball but out of kindness he did. As he swung and the ball lifted skyward, I was thinking about next summer, how I wouldn't quit, how I would practice with the older boys, how I would come back and make the team.

That's when it happened. As the ball reached the apex of its flight, I realized something had changed. I could see the ball clearly now and I knew just where that ball was going to come down; it was hit to my right and would come down far behind me. As the ball floated for what seemed an eternity, thoughts of joy ran through my heart, thoughts of how easy it was now, how much fun it was, the fun of playing pickup games that summer, the fun of being a good baseball player like JJ promised, and most of all, the joy of making the team next summer. I was gliding effortlessly after that long fly ball and when the ball slammed firmly into the glove with an over-the-shoulder catch, it was as if a gift had been delivered, a gift promising good times playing baseball.

I ran off the field with happiness and joy written all over my face---so much so in fact that the manager was puzzled and he assumed that I had misunderstood. He called me over, and he got down on one knee while trying to patiently explain to me that there weren't enough uniforms and he had to give the last uniform to Richard. But I cut him short and happily exclaimed "I know! I'm going to make the team next year!" He looked even more puzzled as I ran off the field to meet my father who had just arrived to pick me up. My father saw the joy on my face and he wrongly assumed I had made the team as he said "Well, it looks like you made the team!" When I told him no, his face took on an angry countenance, and he said "I'll have to talk to the manager." I knew that wouldn't go well so I ran in front of him to stop him, saying "It's all right. I'll make the team next year!" That didn't quite satisfy him, but it was enough to get him turned around for a grumpy ride home. I understood though; after all, he didn't know about the gift.

I didn't have to wait until next summer for the promise to start coming true. The

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very next day, I hopped on my bike, the one that used to be JJ's, and headed a short way up the road to the farm field where the older boy's were choosing up sides for a game. These were same boys who tormented me and a friend my age named Jimmy. But that didn't matter because I knew I would get to play if an even number of boys showed up---there were never enough to make a full team. An odd number would leave me the odd kid out, but luck was with me that day, and the promise started to come true that very day. I hit every pitch and caught every ball hit my way. What fun!

And the fun continued. The next day, they were choosing sides as always. It was the custom for one team captain to toss a bat to the other team captain who would catch it one-handed and hold tight. They would then grab alternately, hand over hand, until they reached the bat handle. Whoever grabbed the handle got to choose first. As I recall, it was Doc and Buck, with Doc winning first choice. Doc made his choice and then Buck looked around, studying the players available for his first pick. I was amazed to hear him yell "Yurkon!" (my last name), and I was even more amazed to hear someone exclaim "God Damn you Buck! I knew you were going to do that!" I knew then, for sure, that the promised gift was being delivered; good times were coming!

True to the promise, there was joy, not only that summer but next summer also. And, it wasn't just making the team; it was being starting first baseman, tripling on the first at bat, winning games, winning the championship, winning a trophy. Then there were three more summers of joy in the Babe Ruth League. There was the joy of a fifteen year old making the All Star team that won the Pennsylvania State Championship. Can you imagine the thrill of winning in Connie Mack Stadium and then turning the field over to the Philadelphia Phillies for an evening game with the Chicago Cubs? Both Babe Ruth league teams were guests of the Phillies for the game, and we were treated to 3rd base box seats. Can you imagine the thrill of watching Robin Roberts win his 200th game against Ernie Banks and the Cubs on the same field you played on just hours before? Ernie Banks! A baseball god at shortstop so close you could almost talk to him! And, I can't forget the foul ball that had my name on it, or so I thought until a sea of outstretched hands literally blocked all daylight, and the baseball, from coming to my waiting hands. Those were summers of joy that I wish every boy could experience.

In retrospect, I wonder about that special moment when time seemed to stop as the ball floated in the sky. I knew even back then that something had changed, a gift had been delivered, but I didn't question why; I just enjoyed the good times that followed. However, I now believe that ball was touched by a tear from someone above who couldn't bear the agony anymore of watching a boy who just wouldn't quit, a boy waiting for a promise to come true. You may think I'm just a dreamer, but I really believe that JJ was granted permission to deliver on his promise when he could no

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longer bear the agony of watching his little brother try in vain. Thank you big brother for a promise delivered; your word truly was golden!

~~~~~ **A Lifesaving Forewarning** ~~~~~

We have this thing called a 6th sense, that sense that seems to tell us when something is not right but we don't quite know why. Sometimes we pay attention to it and sometimes we don't. And, often, it turns out to be nothing at all, just a case of worrying too much. But there are times where the sense that something is wrong is correct, and we wonder if someone was trying to give us a warning. I would like to tell of one such incident that was a very critical turn of events in my life.

On a dark night in 1964, I was driving southbound on route 18 from Erie, Pennsylvania towards Sharon, Pennsylvania with my expectant first wife and one year old son. We made this trip frequently to visit my wife's sister, and I knew the road well. Driving my usual 60 or so mph, we were approaching a crossroads where a secondary road crossed our road which had no stop sign; the intersecting road did have a stop sign. There was no sign of any other vehicle, but a sense of impending doom filled my mind. I looked both ways for signs of a vehicle but could see no headlights in either direction. However, the sense of impending doom was so great, I braked hard just before reaching the crossroads. To my amazement, headlights traveling at a very high speed flashed into view from the right. The headlights had been completely hidden by a long and high row of very dense hedges. I can see that eerie sight today as clear as I did those many years ago.

The speeding car's interior was fully illuminated by the headlights of my Studebaker whose nose was diving low due to hard braking. Almost directly in front of me, I could see four well-lit faces staring wide-eyed, mouths gaping, expecting death in an instant. There were two adults, a man and woman in the front seat, and a teenage-looking boy and girl sitting in the back seat. Their car was going so fast that it went airborne after bouncing off the crest of route 18. The grim reaper was cheated on that night. A family would have been extinguished had I not paid heed to the the warning of impending doom. It's hard to say, but I believe it was my family and I who were spared death that dark night, and I owe someone a big thank you. I don't know from whom or from where the life-saving warning came, but I like to think that it is JJ who I should be thanking.

~~~~~ **Call to a Plane** ~~~~~

Have you ever experienced a moment where you feel that a lost loved one is nearby, wishing you well or giving you comfort, perhaps giving you a warm feeling inside. I would guess that most of us have experienced a moment like that, perhaps knowing not only who is nearby but also where. I feel compelled to tell of one such

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incident.

It was probably 25 years ago that I went to an air show with my adult son. The air show was near Jefferson, Ohio and featured WWII aircraft. I had been to air shows like this before, where they featured WWII vintage aircraft, and where they would even fly one or more at the show. The sights and sounds of these old planes always reminded me of my days with JJ, waving at the low-flying planes so the pilot would wave back. This day was to be different, however.

As we were walking into the grounds, the engine of one plane was started and run for a few seconds. The engine's sound wasn't coming from the public display area; it was coming from a maintenance hanger which wasn't part of the show. I cannot put into words what I felt at that moment. I immediately felt JJ's presence beside me, telling me "Ted! You've got to see this!" Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought "Oh my god!, I never expected to see you ever again but here you are!" I turned, expecting to see my long lost brother, only to see empty space where I expected to see him. I was confused and heartbroken, but they started the engine again for a few seconds, and I felt the same calling just as strongly. And, not just a second time but a 3rd time as well.

Convinced that I had to see that plane, I turned to my son and explained that I had to go to the hangar to see that plane. When we arrived there, I saw two mechanics moving about, and I asked if they had just started an engine. One of the mechanics replied in the affirmative, pointing to a gray WW II single-engine fighter. I asked, and we were granted permission to look at the plane.

It was a slender fighter, not familiar to me. So, I kneeled and read from the informative decal on its side. It was manufactured in Czechoslovakia which, in itself, was interesting to me because my father was Czechoslovakian. That didn't really matter much though. It was what I read on the last line of the decal that hit me. The plane was commissioned into service on February 27, 1943, the very day I was born! When I read that last line, a wonderful sense of calm and relief came over me. I knew that it was JJ who wanted me to see that date, but I also knew that all was well with the big brother I loved so much. He was with me again.

~~~~~ **A Second Ending** ~~~~~

It seems that all things have a beginning and an ending, although the ending isn't always what we think. And too, most endings come as a surprise, happening at a moment when we least expect it. I make at least one journey each year to Saint Mary's Cemetery in Hermitage, Pennsylvania to place flowers on JJ's grave. It gives me a good feeling inside to know that others may see the flowers and know that someone named Julius Joseph Garity, who died too early in 1951, is still remembered. As I was

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sitting there in the grass on a warm, sunny Memorial Day, reflecting back to our youth, wishing JJ and I could ride that road home again on our bikes to watch planes flying over, I heard a familiar sound.

WW II era planes have a unique sound. It seems the engines are lower revving, and louder and more melodious than modern planes---a soothing sound. There must have been an air show going on, perhaps at Youngstown Airport. What I saw when I turned to look behind me was a twin-engined WW II plane approaching, flying very low. It seemed as if the pilot was using the cemetery as a visual cue for when to turn back toward the airport because the plane banked hard right and executed a 90 degree turn right around the perimeter of the cemetery. The plane was low enough and banked tightly enough that I could see the pilot and the copilot clearly, seemingly wearing uniforms appropriate for the WW II era.

I didn't wave because I already knew what was going to happen and why, but I was praying it wouldn't. I had felt a message just like the time I felt "Ted! You've got to see this!" but this time from a distance. This time it was a good bye. But this good bye wasn't really because of an ending, it was because of a beginning, the beginning of a new adventure or a new assignment. It would be an ending to me, however, as tears welled up in my eyes again because I knew that plane would wave back to me as if JJ were waving goodbye, and I would have to say good bye again, no matter how hard I prayed I wouldn't. As the plane leveled off coming out of the turn and flew level for a short distance, I hopefully thought for a moment that I was wrong, JJ wasn't really leaving again. But, just then, that plane gave me the biggest wave I had ever seen, and all I could think was "Good bye JJ. Enjoy your new adventure! But if we ever meet again sometime in eternity, let me have the role of big brother looking after you. You deserve it."

~~~~~ **Epilogue** ~~~~~

To anyone who has read this story, I would like to say thank you, and I would like to add that nothing in this story is fictional. This is the story of my life with JJ and experiences I had after his death. Perhaps I am delusional, perhaps I am not, but this is an honest story on my part. As stated in the Prologue, my primary motive in writing this was to tell the story of JJ. I also hoped that this story might provide some comfort and hope to those who have lost loved ones for any reason. However, another powerful motivation for me to write this story was to make people aware that polio has not been eradicated. It still destroys or damages the lives of many, especially children. I would ask anyone who was moved by JJ's story to please consider educating yourself on the current status of polio, and then consider giving to a charity or foundation working to eradicate polio. Also, please consider giving to organizations that assist those who have been crippled by polio to lead normal lives.

My Brother JJ and His Battle with Polio

I have listed below organizations and charities that are active at the time of writing this story. Please be aware, however, that I cannot personally endorse any of these organizations and charities. Before donating, please do some due diligence. Several watchdog organizations such as the Better Business Bureau rate the major charities. If you do give, and if possible, please consider giving in the name of Julius Joseph Garity. I know it would make him happy.

Polio Organizations and Charities:

United Nations Foundation, Polio Eradication Initiative

<http://www.unfoundation.org/what-we-do/campaigns-and-initiatives/polio-eradication-initiative/>

Unicef, Children First

<https://www.unicefusa.org/mission/survival/immunization/polio>

Rotary, End Polio Now

<http://www.endpolio.org/>

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Polio Strategy Overview

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Polio>

Polio Children, Helping Afflicted Children

<http://www.poliochildren.org/>



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